

(EXCERPT)

Diplomatic Desk at 7:15 p.m. over WGM (Washington):

GABRIEL DOGLIATTI: "One of our newspaper colleagues was in Rome awhile ago on a magazine assignment and he sends us a letter. We suspect that he wants us to read it, because he gave it a title, 'Guilt by Present Association.' Here it is.

"As soon as I got my suit pressed, I looked in on the AP office to find out who was premier and all such (things?). The same day I called up an old friend, but instead of talking, he tells me to grab a cab, they're having company for lunch and they'll wait for me. His place is famous for splendor, a show-place, one of the places in Rome that has footmen."

(The writer of the letter then described meeting a beautiful 19-year-old girl with a title similar to that of a Baroness, who had come out of the Danube. He was asked to help her get a six-month's visitor's permit to New York, which he said was being stalled by the U. S. Consulate.)

"This time I by-passed the visa desk and called a man who's way up in the Embassy. He suggested we have lunch. And about the time we're having strawberries, we get down to business. Now this girl, he said, have you a personal interest? Emphatically no, I said. That's good, he said, we don't discuss security cases, you'd be smart not to sponsor people. Who's sponsoring? Well, he said, you're sure (WORD UNCLEAR). We talked some more but I couldn't get anything more except that it's not smart to sponsor strangers.

"I dialed the Baroness and told her to get to the hotel fast. She came and I told her I'd just seen an embassy man. There's something wrong, I tell her, Baby, give. Ever join anything to the left? The communists, she said quietly, shot my father. How about fascists? That, she said, I believe was over with when I was ten. We (floundered?) some more for awhile, and then it came. I wonder, she mused, if it could be my brother. He was a communist. And then I hear her tell how this rich 17-year-old lad had developed a concern for suffering humanity and thought that the answer was to holler at communist rallies. I say there, thinking of my visit to the embassy, and wondering about those stories how every fifth man in our embassy was supposed to be CIA, and I gently perspired.

"But what has this to do with me, asked the pretty girl, I loathe communism. Money, I said sadly, it's complicated; there are Senate committees and House committees; there's an immigration law and a security law, and the FBI and the CIA. The fact that you hate communism barely puts you on first base. Our government doesn't figure it owes you the labor of finding out if a communist in your family is dangerous or just quaint.

"Well, the story ends there, says the letter. Sitting in that ornate hotel bar, looking at the lovely profile, I had to choose: Prince Valiant and rescue a baroness, or sneak out the back. I never hesitated. I sneaked.

"I made one more call at the embassy, to tell them that I just met the lovely thing, in a royalist household, in fact, and wasn't sponsoring anybody. Well, we know that, said the man. We know everything.

"You can't tell me, concludes the letter, that every fifth man is not a CIA man."